

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PANAMA 02682 190146Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 PA-02 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00
ICAE-00 INRE-00 SAB-02 /056 W
-----070052 190150Z /21

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6645
INFO PANCANAL
USCINCSO

UNCLAS PANAMA 2682

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PEPR, PN
SUBJECT: TORRIJOS PRESS CONFERENCE

REF: PANAMA 2681

1. IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING HIS ADDRESS TO THE NATION,
GEN. TORRIJOS APPEARED AT A PRESS CONFERENCE AT THE
PANAMA CITY HOLIDAY INN; PRESS CONFERENCE WAS CARRIED
ON SAME NATIONWIDE RADIO AND TV NETWORK AS ADDRESS.

2. RESPONDING TO A QUESTION ABOUT A SECOND PLEBISCITE,
TORRIJOS SAID HIS GOVERNMENT WAS NOT THINKING ABOUT A
PLEBISCITE, BUT RATHER ABOUT WHETHER THE TREATIES AS
APPROVED BY THE SENATE WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE TO PANAMA
OR NOT. THEY WERE ACCEPTABLE, AND PANAMA ACCEPTED THEM.

3. ASKED TO CLARIFY THE REMARK IN HIS ADDRESS THAT HAD
THE SENATE NOT APPROVED THE TREATIES, TOMORROW WOULD
HAVE BEGUN ANOTHER ROAD TO LIBERATION, TORRIJOS STATED
THAT THE DECISION HAD ALREADY BEEN CAREFULLY WEIGHED
AND TAKEN BY THE PANAMANIAN ARMED FORCES THAT IF SENATE
APPROVAL WAS DENIED, PANAMA WOULD NEGOTIATE NO LONGER.

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THE ARMED FORCES WOULD THEN HAVE LED A STRUGGLE FOR
NATIONAL LIBERATION.

4. CLARIFYING REMARK IN ADDRESS REGARDING PANAMA'S
ROLE IN DEFENDING THE CANAL, TORRIJOS SAID ONE MUST
RECALL THAT, DESPITE ANYTHING ANY OTHER COUNTRY MIGHT
DO, THE NATIONAL GUARD HAD THE POWER TO DESTROY THE

CANAL. BY NOT DESTROYING IT, THERE WERE IPSO FACTO
INSTRUMENTAL AND OPERATIVE ACTORS IN ITS DEFENSE.

5. ONE CORRESPONDENT ASKED HOW THE UNITED STATES COULD
INTERVENE IN PANAMA TO PROTECT THE NEUTRALITY OF THE
CANAL WITHOUT INTERVENING IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF
PANAMA. TORRIJOS RESPONDED THAT THIS WAS BY DEFINITION
IMPOSSIBLE; IF THE UNITED STATES SHOULD SEEK TO
INTERVENE AGAINST PANAMA'S WILL OR WITHOUT
ITS CONSENT, THE NATIONAL GUARD COULD DESTROY THE CANAL
AND THERE WAS NO SUCH THING AS PROTECTING THE NEUTRALITY
OF A DESTROYED CANAL. CONTINUING IN THE SAME VEIN, HE
TOLD ANOTHER QUESTIONER THAT HE HAD NEVER INTENDED TO
BECOME THE LEADER WHO SIGNED SOMETHING THAT WOULD
JUSTIFY THE FIRST INTERVENTION IN PANAMA IN THE
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY--AND HE HAD NOT DONE SO. A MAJORITY
IN THE SENATE, HE FELT, HAD SEEN AND ACKNOWLEDGED
PANAMA'S REALITY. THE MINORITY HAD PLACED THE CANAL
WITHIN TWO VOTES OF BEING DESTROYED. IT WAS IMMATERIAL
THAT THE DECONCINI AMENDMENT APPLIED TO THE PERMANENT
NEUTRALITY TREATY WHILE THE LEADERSHIP MODIFICATION OF
IT RELATED TO THE CANAL TREATY. THE FACT WAS THAT THE
FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES WERE FOUR TO SIX HOURS AWAY
FROM PANAMA, AND IF THEY SOUGHT TO INTERVENE AFTER 2000,
THEY COULD ONLY INTERVENE TO FIND A DESTROYED CANAL. JORDEN

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